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NAMING EXPERIENCE AND REVEALING SENTIMENT:  
THE ARCHETYPAL JOURNEY IN EDNA ST VINCENT MILLAY'S "RENASCENCE"

by

JENNIFER R. FORSTHOEFEL

Under the Direction of Dr. Marti Singer

ABSTRACT

This thesis uses archetypal theory as explained by Carol Pearson in *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* to illustrate the heroic journey undertaken by the protagonist in Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Renascent." Feminist archetypal theory is a useful lens for gaining the reader access to the underlying paradigms of struggle experienced by the female literary character because it exposes the parallels that exist in separate female experiences. By applying Pearson's theory to Millay's work, readers are able to elucidate more clearly the methods used by the poet to create commonality and continuity with her female audience. Throughout the poem, the protagonist hero recursively circles through the Innocent, Orphan, Martyr, Wanderer, Warrior, and Magician phases. This essay utilizes a close reading strategy to illustrate its argument and provide evidence to its conclusions.

INDEX WORDS: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Archetypal theory, Archetypes, Carol Pearson

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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Jennifer R. Forsthoefel  
2009

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THE ARCHETYPAL JOURNEY IN EDNA ST VINCENT MILLAY'S "RENASCENCE"

by

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College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  
August 2009

"Heroism  
is redefined as not only  
moving mountains  
but knowing mountains;  
being fully oneself  
and seeing,  
without denial,  
what is,  
and being open  
to learning the lessons  
life offers us"

—Carol Pearson *The Hero Within*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Marti Singer, Dr. Paul Schmidt, and Dr. Mary Hocks, whose encouragement never wavered. In addition, I would like to recognize Dr. Jan Gabler-Hover, who was an integral part of the early work on this project. I would also like to acknowledge my family, particularly my mother and father, who continue to give me strength in too many ways for me to explain in this small space. Finally, I would like to thank my fantastic support group, particularly Layla Moughari, Juliette Kitchens, Melanie McDougald, Cara Minardi, and Peter Fontaine, who always knew I would finish this, even when I was not sure that I ever could.



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## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Poet and The Poem

Critical attention to Edna St Vincent Millay's work began when she was nineteen years old as a result of a contest in association with *The Lyric Year*, an anthology of the best works written in 1912. Although she did not win the contest, the poem she submitted, entitled "Renascence," was praised as the best work in the anthology. For example, Harriet Monroe wrote in her review that "'Renascence' gave me the only thrill I received from Mr Kennerley's 1912 anthology, *The Lyric Year*. It was so much the best poem in that collection that probably it's no wonder it didn't receive any one of the three prizes" (33). Louis Untermeyer described similar feelings in his review, arguing that

contrary to current belief, none of the three prizes was won by the outstanding poem in the book—a poem which has become one of the most famous in contemporary letters. Its author, totally unknown at the time, was little more than a child living on the seacoast of Maine, and it was not until her first book was published five years later that it became possible to appraise the work of Edna St Vincent Millay (115).

It is worthy to note, as Untermeyer points out, that Millay wrote "Renascence" at a very young age without having gone to college or received any formal training in poetry. However, as a result of publishing her first work in *The Lyric Year*, Millay was given a scholarship to Vassar College to study poetry. What resulted was the book which Untermeyer speaks of in his review,

*Renascence and Other Poems*, published in 1917. However, this publication marked only the beginning of her success.

Edna St Vincent Millay went on from this achievement to publish multiple volumes of poetry, including sonnets, the form for which she is now most celebrated. She received numerous honors, including the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1923, the first ever awarded to a woman. Major publishing events celebrated the emergence of each volume of her poetry, as her collections initially achieved both critical praise as well as mainstream popularity. However, with the rise of Modernism and the development of New Criticism in response to such poets as TS Eliot and Ezra Pound, academic audiences prioritized displays of intellect over accessibility. The tradition of the modernist poets included appealing to an elite audience who had the knowledge to decipher obscure allusions and complicated references. Therefore, as Millay's popularity grew with mainstream audiences, critics began to question her abilities, doubting that these readers could appreciate the work of a legitimately talented poet. With the publication of Millay's *Huntsman, What Quarry*, a collection of poetry which was largely regarded as propaganda because of its alluded support of the United State's involvement in World War II, scholarly interest in her work continued to decline. As Cheryl Walker explains in her essay "Antimodern, Modern, and Postmodern Millay," that "critical reception at that time was chilly. Millay was seen as, once again, sounding off about her feelings rather than analyzing the structural components of the political impasse" (174-175). While this denunciation of her talents, due to her allusions to sentiment in her work, continues in some circles of academic opinion today, the past few decades have brought a critical reappraisal of Millay, a pursuit to which I hope to contribute with the application of archetypal theory to her work.

Through her poetry, Millay sought to empower readers to confront and embrace experiences associated with sexuality and self-discovery. She strove to create commonality with her audience, particularly with women, an element which lends Millay's first published piece "Renaissance" to be studied effectively from a feminist archetypal perspective. More specifically, the poem illustrates feminist archetypal heroic journey as defined by Carol Pearson, circling through the stages of Innocent, Orphan, Martyr, Wanderer, Warrior, and Magician in 214 lines of tetrameter couplets.

### **Archetypal Theory**

In the chapter entitled "The Problem of Types in Poetry," from the book *Psychological Types*, psychologist C.G. Jung, well known at the time of Edna St Vincent Millay's writing, defined archetypes by explaining that

the primordial image or archetype is a figure, whether it be a daemon, man, or process, that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is freely manifested. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure. If we subject these images to a closer examination, we discover them to be the formulated resultants of countless typical experiences of our ancestors. They are, as it were, the psychic residue of numberless experiences of the same type (246).

Carl Jung identified archetypes as patterns in the human psyche which have originated in the past and continue to be embedded in human experience. Northrop Frye expands upon this in his definition, stating that "by archetype I mean an element in a work of literature, whether a character, an image, a narrative formula, or an idea, which can be assimilated into a larger unifying category" (203). Drawing from these and other definitions of the archetype, Dr. Carol

Pearson, a graduate of Rice University's English program and currently a Professor of Leadership Studies in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland College Park, has written several works pertinent to the development archetypal theory, including *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By*, the text from which I draw the concepts of the heroic journey which occurs in Edna St Vincent Millay's poem "Renaissance," in which a young innocent moves from naiveté towards self-actualization and a more comprehensive understanding of her surrounding environment.

The archetypal pattern Pearson describes is schematic; however, this does not mean that there is a definite order or linear fashion to the journey. She explains that she "would illustrate the typical hero's progression as a cone or a three-dimensional spiral, in which it is possible to move forward while frequently circling back" (Pearson 13). *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* presents six archetypes which govern a hero's journey: Innocent, Orphan, Martyr, Wanderer, Warrior, and the Magician. The following directory depicts the points of the hero's journey. Drawing from Pearson's descriptions of each archetypal stage, I have constructed a brief summary of notable characteristics of each archetype (xxiii, 4, 14, 20, 21):

- Innocent: Lives in a prefallen state of grace

Goal: To remain in the Edenic world

Task/Achievement: The Fall

Fear: Loss of paradise

- Orphan: Confronts the reality of the Fall

Goal: Safety

Task/Achievement: Overcoming denial; hope, independence

Fear: Abandonment and exploitation

- Martyr: Learns to give, to commit, and to sacrifice for others

Goal: Goodness, care, responsibility

Task/Achievement: Ability to care, give up, and give away

Fear: Selfishness, callousness

- Wanderer: Begins the task of finding oneself apart from others

Goal: Autonomy and independence

Task/Achievement: Identity and vocation

Fear: Conformity

- Warrior: Learns to fight to defend oneself

Goal: Strength, effectiveness

Task/Achievement: Courage, assertiveness, confidence, respect

Fear: Weakness, ineffectuality

- Magician: Learns that life is a gift

Goal: Wholeness, authenticity, balance

Task/Achievement: Joy, abundance, acceptance, faith

Fear: Uncentered superficiality, alienation from self and others

The influence of Feminist archetypal theory to Pearson's quest is that the journey is recursive, an element which I will discuss in more detail in the following pages. Pearson postulates that while there are a great deal of other archetypes available from various life and literary tales, "most do not have the influence on our development that these six do" (Pearson XXV). In her introduction, she asserts that these archetypes apply mainly to Western culture, and can be attributed to the journeys of both men and women. In addition, she claims that, unlike the motives of Jung and other archetypal theorists, she only intends to address the conscious motives of human action, not

the unconscious. The archetypes she names are interrelated and working through one element of the journey ultimately assists in completing another yet unknown factor. Therefore, to apply these archetypes to the protagonist in “Renascence” allows a better understanding of the character and the phase in the journey that she is currently undertaking.

Just as Millay’s work has been criticized for its simplicity, similar accusations have been ascribed to Archetypal theory, as it has been harshly critiqued for essentializing power and described as oppressive in nature due to its perceived tendency to characterize actions as predetermined. For example, poststructuralist critics such as Roland Barthes assert that the Archetypal system attributes an unwarranted power under the guise of what is “natural” or predetermined rather than subjective. Barthes addresses this specifically, claiming that

myth can be defined neither by its object nor its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning...we are no longer dealing here with a theoretical mode of representation: we are dealing with this particular image which is given for this particular signification...In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives the simplicity of essences...It organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things seem to mean something within themselves (110).

Barthes asserts that by attributing a universal nature to literature which contains imagery and symbols that are personal in significance, archetypes are thereby reductive, simplifying and blurring important distinctions. H.M. Block<sup>1</sup> and W.W. Douglas<sup>2</sup> have added to this criticism,

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<sup>1</sup> See H.M. Block, “Cultural Anthropology and Contemporary Literary Criticism,” *JAAC*, 11 (1952).

<sup>2</sup> See W.W. Douglas, “The Meanings of ‘Myth’ in Modern Criticism,” *MP*, 50 (1953).



accusing archetypal theory of being too naïve or simplistic to reveal with any legitimate certainty the parallels of human experience. However, Pearson addresses the popular perception of archetypal theory as predisposed to biases in her quest to rectify the misappropriation of the feminine archetypes. In asserting the pragmatic basis of her approach, she recognizes that

although the patterns I believe hold up in general, individual psyches are very diverse, and their autonomy and uniqueness need to be respected. These patterns can help you along, because you can name the experiences that you or others are going through, you can hasten learning and make experience easier and less threatening. They should, however, never be seen as normative, as stages one must go through or be forever inadequate (159).

Pearson seems to be taking the criticism of Barthes and other poststructuralists into account as she exposes the patterns found in her research of women's poetry and fiction instead of applying a set of preconceived archetypes to draw conclusions about overarching themes.

A ground-breaking analyst and associate of Jung named John Weir Perry developed a theory similar to Pearson's based on his observations of schizophrenic patients seeking psychological assistance. He develops archetypal stages which he found that all of his patients pass through and characterizes them with a term that is common in the imagery found in language used by patients to describe their journey towards a clearer understanding of their condition.<sup>3</sup> Although Pearson does not cite Perry in her work, it is interesting to note that her images and stage descriptions are very similar to those described by Perry in his work "The Reconstructive Process in the Psychopathology of the Self," providing some evidence to the

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<sup>3</sup> Archetypes include "Madonna and Child," "Great Mother and Son Lover," "Sky Father and Hero," "Secret Society and Initiate," "Royal Brother and Sister Pair," "Sky God and Earth Goddess." See Allan G. Hunter *The Stories We Need to Know: Reading Your Life Path Through Literature* (2008) for details on the methodology and results of Perry's research as well as the similarity of his archetypes to Pearson's.

existence of a persistent pattern that others unconnected to one another have identified, ultimately leading to a similar construction of archetypes.

### **Feminist Archetypal Theory**

Several feminist scholars have revamped Jungian concepts into a heroic journey that emphasizes the empowerment of women. These scholars do not use archetypes to trap characterization into a structured model, but to identify continuously evolving conceptions of distinctively female concerns that have persisted throughout history. Feminist archetypal theory<sup>4</sup> strives to emphasize the empowerment of women, not to essentialize this power. Therefore, Feminist scholars use archetypes not to stifle characterization into a preconceived mold as Barthes suggests, but to motivate the development of character through images and patterns derived from heroic journeys of the past through an examination of artistic expressions such as literature. This reinterpretation of the role of archetypes in the feminine experience has proven to be fruitful in my application for this thesis. Feminist archetypal theory assists in illuminating the female heroic journeys that are illustrated in works such as “Renascence,” thus aiding readers in reinscribing the “weaknesses” formerly attributed to Millay as stylistic strategies to create links between herself and her audience.

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<sup>4</sup> A concise explanation of the Feminist view of archetypal theory can be found in *Feminist Archetypal Theory: Interdisciplinary Re-Visions of Jungian Thought* which states that “If we regard the archetype not as an image whose content is frozen but as a tendency to form and re-form images in relation to certain kinds of repeated experience, then the concept could serve to clarify distinctively female concerns that have persisted throughout human history. Applied to a broad range of materials from women, it could expose a set of reference points that would serve as an expandable framework for defining female experience, and ultimately the ‘muted’ culture females have created.” Estella Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupprecht 14.

Using archetypal reading, the heroic journey of the woman in the poem “Renascence,” towards individuation<sup>5</sup> will be illuminated to gain greater insight into the struggles of women who lived and wrote in trying times such as those who endured the debate on women’s suffrage, when sexual freedom and self-actualization were difficult to achieve. Carol Pearson is counted as a Feminist archetypal theorist because of the recursive nature of her journey theory as well as the influences she cites in her book. She attempts to evade the patriarchal tradition from which most archetypes derive by inductively establishing complementary archetypes that are powerful and functional to feminist critics. Drawing from the work of James Hillman, Pearson does not wish to examine a collective unconscious, but instead conscious manifestations, defining archetypes as “generative images that merit our repeated attention” that are recognizable in texts. Hillman claims that “the archetype is not an entity in itself so much as a process of valuing an image,” allowing readers to discover how the image is basic, necessary and universal (84). Therefore, he insists that “by attaching ‘archetypal’ to an image, we ennoble or empower the image with the widest, richest, and deepest possible significance” (82). It is the recognition of these patterns and images which allows Millay’s poetry to be opened up to this new method of interpreting the text, as she was guided by an intense desire to create cohesion with her audience rather than alienation in a manner typical of modernist poets.

In addition to Hillman, Jung, and Frye, Pearson cites several influences in developing this theory, including Carol Gilligan, a notable psychology scholar whose study of moral development entitled *In a Different Voice* claimed that women were more likely to see the world in terms of nets or webs of connectedness rather than hierarchies. Therefore, in Pearson’s

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<sup>5</sup> Individuation is defined by Jung as “the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology.” C.G. Jung. *Psychological Types*. Collected Works Vol.6., par. 757

feminist version of the archetypal journey, the archetypes are interrelated, recursive, and without certain linearity. Therefore, scholars are able to apply these archetypes to the characters they contact in literature to gain a better understanding of these characters and where they are in their journey towards individuation.

Recent criticism of Millay has sought to situate her work in the framework of psychoanalysis and gender studies,<sup>6</sup> fields which are closely related, but do not delineate the quests of her protagonists. In addition, a great deal of focus has been recently given to her work in drama,<sup>7</sup> particularly how her choices in form and style compare to those in her prose and poetry. I hope to bring a new focus to Millay's first contribution to the literary canon, "Renaissance," by providing a close reading of her poetry from an archetypal perspective. In her work, Pearson maintains that feminist archetypal theory provides access to the underlying paradigms of female struggle that expose the parallels that exist in separate female experiences. By applying Pearson's theory to Millay's work, I will elucidate more clearly the methods used by the poet to create commonality and continuity with her female audience. In applying Pearson's work to Millay's poem "Renaissance," I intend to illuminate patterns rather than reductive characteristics. In doing this, I hope to approach Millay's poetry from a fresh perspective, thus providing new observations and insights into the poet, her poetry, and the time period in which she lived.

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<sup>6</sup> See Jennifer Ann Smith, "'The lesbian in us': Fashioning Identity in the Love Sequences of Edna St Vincent Millay's *Fatal Interview* and Adrienne Rich's 'Twenty-one Love Poems,'" *Women & Language* 30.2 (2007): 3-12. See Susan Gilmore, "'Poises of Sophistry' Impersonation and Authority in Millay's *Conversation at Midnight*," *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995) 182-197.

<sup>7</sup> See Sandra M. Gilbert, "'Directions for Using the Empress' Millay's Supreme Fiction(s)," *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995) 163-181.

## Methodology

The purpose of this project is to illustrate how feminist archetypal theory, a subset of archetypal theory, developed from the recognition of patterns that have existed in the past, can elucidate a journey that is recurring, providing more evidence to support the possibility of its universality. Although critics have deemed archetypal theory as essentialist, Feminist archetypal theory in particular seeks to empower women through commonality rather than oppress growth through preconceived notions. I also hope to reveal the ways in which Edna St Millay connects to her female audience, enriching the experience through commonality, in her poem “Renascence” by viewing it through an archetypal lens.

I will begin my own journey towards this goal by focusing on lines 1-44 of Millay’s poem “Renascence” in the chapter to follow this introduction. In these lines of the poem, the protagonist moves recursively through the Innocent and Orphan archetypes. The protagonist appears self-centered in this early stage in her development until experiencing the claustrophobia of the limited perspective she has attained up to this point in her development, leading to the first of two “deaths” she experiences in the poem.

The third chapter will examine lines 45-106, in which, following her death, the protagonist begins to move away from the innocence that has fed her lack of self-awareness. She explores more deeply the Wanderer stage, then moves on to circle through the Martyr and stage as well, performing what Pearson calls the “transformative sacrifice,” leading to her second “death.”

The fourth chapter will cover lines 107-214, the final phase of the protagonist’s heroic journey in which she moves once again through the Wanderer and Warrior stages until ending in the Magician stage as her final destination. As I have said previously, Pearson’s theories are

conceptualized cyclically rather than linearly, so elements of each of the phases can be subtly illuminated in each of these sections of the poem. Although the archetypes I have listed in bold subtitles might imply linearity to the journey, these archetypes in relation to each of the chapters dominates that particular section of the poem. The cyclical nature of the protagonist's journey in "Renascence" is particularly evident in chapters three and four as she recursively moves through the Wanderer, Warrior, and Martyr stages, with a movement to one stage ultimately leading her circle back through the others.

Following this close reading, I will then conclude with a brief discussion of how my findings can be used in both scholarly and pedagogical settings. Suggestions for further study and application will be provided in addition to my hopes for both archetypal theory and Millay studies in the future. Millay's "Renascence" illustrates the cyclical nature of the woman's heroic quest towards self-actualization, as the protagonists of her poetry move between the archetypes until ultimately concluding in varying stages of their journeys. The acknowledgment of these archetypes yields an understanding of the text through the perception of feminine empowerment as it exists in women's poetry from the early twentieth century, a notion which was only at the fingertips of many women's expectations of themselves at this point in history

**CHAPTER 2.**

**“OVER THESE THINGS I COULD NOT SEE:**

**THESE WERE THE THINGS THAT BOUNDED ME”**

**THE FIRST DEATH**

Edna St Vincent Millay’s letters speak to an extraordinarily happy childhood. The eldest of three girls, Edna was often charged with the care of her two younger sisters. However, the young beauty was known to spend time wandering the beautiful landscape of Camden, Maine, the town in which she grew up (Milford 5). She would “sit for hours at a time looking at the sea, or she took long walks up Mt. Battie or Mt. Megunticook” (Sprague 142). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the first published piece by the budding poet would be cast in a setting described very similarly to the place of her upbringing.

Invoking the stark landscape of Maine, the protagonist in “Renascence” examines the Edenic natural world that surrounds her, providing readers with a factual, concrete description of the scenery (See Appendix A for “Renascence” in its entirety). Beginning the stanza as she would later end it, the protagonist provides a deceptively simple description, explaining that

All I could see from where I stood

Was three long mountains and a wood (1-2).<sup>8</sup>

There is no alarm in her tone as she provides a simplistic, childlike observation of the scenic paradise that encloses her. However, by beginning with “All I could see,” there is a hint of disappointment, as if the speaker is perhaps expecting a greater view of the scene from her

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<sup>8</sup> The numbers following the excerpts from “Renascence” refer to the poem’s line numbers. See Appendix A for a complete version of the poem by Edna St Vincent Millay from *Renascence and Other Poems* (1917).

perspective than she is actually given. This dissatisfaction is the first sign that the protagonist has begun her archetypal journey, a journey that will ultimately lead her to a greater self-knowledge.

### **The Innocent**

The archetypal pattern according to Pearson begins with the Innocent, a stage in which the hero exists in a prelapsarian<sup>9</sup> world where all of her needs can, and will, be satisfied by a sphere that is absent of pain and suffering. Pearson asserts that, in the worldview of Innocents, “other people, the natural world, everything exists to serve and satisfy them... To Innocents, the earth is there for their pleasure” (Pearson 25). The allusion in the first stanza to the protagonist’s dissatisfaction does not discount the assertion that she is in the Innocent stage of her journey, as the speaker is recounting the events examined in “Renascence” from the past tense. Therefore, the protagonist is able to examine her experiences from the perspective of someone who has already faced the culmination of the happenings she will later describe. The protagonist reflects on her experiences, rather than just recounting them to hear readers, using the past tense “I said” and “I thought” followed by excerpts from the dialogue she used with herself and/or God at that point. By shifting tenses in this manner, the reader is able to become closer to the experience, as Millay creates a presence for her readers in the poem, thus evoking a sentiment and connection with them. The “All” which begins “Renascence” emphasizes the fact that the events that are about to unfold in the poem come from an experienced storyteller, who is now able to reflect on the situation and thereby emphasize the insight she gained as a result.

The mountains are described as nothing more than “long,” while the forest is given no adjective to provide the reader with a better understanding of the protagonist’s assessment of her

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<sup>9</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “prelapsarian” as “Of or relating to the condition of innocence before the Fall; innocent, unspoiled, carefree.”



surroundings. While later in the poem the protagonist provides more vivid descriptions as her perception of the outside world becomes more acute. Her innocence leads her to assume at this point that her observations are universal, as her innocence marks her as unable to recognize the generality of her descriptions because of the narcissism and inexperience with a world outside of one that “exists to serve and satisfy” her (Pearson 25). She counts three mountains in her line of view, assuming that while mountains come in long ranges that are difficult to differentiate without further study, her assessment of how they can be separated is, again, universal. The “wood” is given a similar treatment, as the reader just announces its presence with no explanation of its significance. The vantage point from which the narrator of this poem is observing these natural structures appears to be at a great distance, implying that the troubles and hardships that she will eventually have to overcome are in her future rather than a part of her present state. The intimacy of the natural world has not come upon her at this point in the poem and she continues to see the nature as subservient to her own desires, again, a characteristic Pearson attributes to the Innocent (25).

There is no empty space in the line of vision as she describes it in this first couplet; every part of the protagonist’s view contains something that makes it difficult for her to look beyond the landforms she observes. The mountains are so high that she cannot see outside of them. The trees are so thick that she cannot see between or beneath them. At this point, the third line of the poem, the speaker is still in the Innocent stage of her journey and therefore is untested on what all of this means to her. She completely trusts that God will provide what she desires. Therefore, instead of pondering her lack of view in this direction and discerning a method to overcome this, she decides to turn to another direction, innocently expecting that from there, God will grant her the space to enable her to see farther. However, from this view, all she can see are “Three islands

in a bay” (4). Again, her view of the ocean is crowded by the islands in her line of vision and, again, these islands are given no description, but are instead simply counted. In contrast to her first view of the natural world which contains mountains a wood, islands suggest an ability to see beyond and around the structures in place. However, the speaker in the poem is still not quite satisfied, despite her second view providing an ability to see beyond the structures that the first could not.

The protagonist still seeks more from the natural world. This curiosity is an integral part of the Innocent stage, the expectation that what they seek will always be provided if they only look further. For Innocents, ignorance is not bliss, but rather their expectation is the pursuit of growth in a manner which will ultimately be solely satisfying rather than painful. However, it is the discovery of disappointment that ultimately leads to the protagonist’s Fall.

Naïvely, the protagonist decides to continue in her circle, perhaps hoping to find a better result from another view. At this point she finds herself back to where she initially began saying,

So with my eyes I traced the line

Of the horizon, thin and fine,

Straight around till I was come

Back to where I’d started from (5-8).

The protagonist completes a full circle, testing the view in every direction, and achieves nothing, arriving in the same place she was when she started the Innocent task of looking into the horizon. There is no fear or alarm in this first stanza, as she continues in a circle, finishing the final two lines of the ten-line stanza as she began it,

And all I saw from where I stood

Was three long mountains and a wood (9-10).

The protagonist has assessed her surroundings, which appear to enfold her in an almost womb-like enclosure, an element which also lends itself to an innocent child-like state of being. The protagonist then begins to discover that God has not provided her with the means to find the view that she is seeking beyond the landforms. Pearson explains that “Innocents, who are confronted with the necessity to make their own way in life, eventually feel abandoned, betrayed, even outraged, and do not know that it is, indeed a fortunate fall. At the deepest level of their being, they want to go” (26). She develops in the second stanza the discontentment with the view that she has been given and desire for a more inclusive vision of the world around her, as she catapults her fall from her Innocent state.

### **The Orphan**

The second stanza begins with a statement of the knowledge the protagonist has gained from the experiences described in the first stanza, yet this knowledge alarms her as she complains that

Over these things I could not see  
 These were the things that bounded me  
 And I could touch them with my hand,  
 Almost, I thought, from where I stand (11-14).

The use of the word “bound” alerts the reader to the protagonist’s change in tone, as she is now uncomfortable in her environment. She is now aware that she is confined by these landmarks that mark her defined limits (*OED* “bound”). The distance that was described in the first stanza has now diminished unexpectedly as she explains she can touch them with her hand. Pearson asserts that “disillusionment comes to us all as we learn that the world is not always—or perhaps never

is—how we have been taught that it should be” as Innocents become no longer naïve enough to believe that a higher power will provide all that they seek (27). This couplet is the reader’s first glimpse into the protagonist’s shift into the Orphan phase of her heroic journey, a phase in which the hero becomes a “disappointed idealist” whose “dominant emotion is fear and basic motivation is survival” (27). She is alone in this realization of being trapped, abandoned by those who have led her to this naïve understanding of the world around her. This stanza records the first insinuation of “The Fall” which instigates her recognition that the world around her is not as she assumed it to be.

The speaker goes on to assert that she feels as though these mountains, woods, and islands were so close to her in the universe that she could actually touch them with her own hands. Her visual perspective has literally been altered since the first stanza, where she was far from her boundaries or limitations. If she is able to actually touch the “things” that had once bounded her, she now has no room for movement as the distance has disappeared altogether. However, she is still unsure, as she says she uses the word “almost” and “I thought” to display her own insecurity with her perception of the world around her (13-14). She is still unwilling to test whether or not she is actually able to touch the landmarks as she suspects. She does not move close, but maintains her position as “where I stand!” an exclamation which illustrates that she is too fearful to move forward at this moment (14). She feels as though she should reach beyond these limitations which have been placed before her, but by touching these previously described landforms, they then become tangible instead of mere beliefs. The feeling of claustrophobia begins to close in on her as she says,

And all at once things seemed so small

My breath came short, and scarce at all (15-16).

These feelings of fear and suffocation alert the reader to the coming “Fall,” the Innocent’s movement toward the Orphan state. Pearson describes The Fall as occurring when the hero becomes disillusioned by her familiar surroundings, as “the Orphan is a disappointed idealist, and the greater the ideals about the world, the worse reality appears” (Pearson 27). The speaker in “Renascence” is moving from a naïve state of mind where she saw only the surface of surroundings, to the more fearful Orphan state of mind, where she realizes that the world around her is not all that her simple assumptions have led her to believe. Millay illustrates this fall in imagery that is similar to “death,” something the reader becomes aware of as the protagonist of the poem begins to have trouble breathing, actually barely breathing at all. The world created by God is not there to serve her as she once believed, and now she begins to deny herself the very basic element of survival that the world afford us: oxygen.

At this point, however, the speaker does not completely give in to that fear. Striving to hold on to the Innocent state, she decides to look to the sky instead of out on the horizon, asserting,

But, sure, the sky is big, I said:

Miles and miles above my head.

So here upon my back I’ll lie

And look my fill into the sky (17-20).

She again looks to the sky in hopes that it will offer her limitless possibilities. Pearson explains that “the dominant worldview of the Orphan is fear, and its basic motivation is survival” (27). Having felt the beginning stages of the Fall, the speaker of “Renascence” is already adopting some of the Orphan characteristics, as she denies the impending disappointment out of fear,

clinging to what little evidence she still has of her previous worldview to ensure her survival as Innocent.

Instead of the escape she hopes, the protagonist finds that “after all/The sky is not so very tall” as she had hoped it would be (21-22). The following lines not only consist of her suspecting her previous fear that the sky is not as limitless as she thought, but a couple of assertions of the protagonist herself into the narrative, using phrases such as “I said” and “I thought,” hinting perhaps at the personal nature of the incidents depicted in the poem, while also reminding the reader of the sentimentality of the story. She is describing the events that have already occurred, and in her most terrifying moment, she assures the reader that she ultimately lives through this by asserting her presence in the past tense (lines 14, 17, 23).

The Innocent’s inherent desire to Fall is illustrated by “Renascence” in the final six couplets on the second stanza. The protagonist wonders “The sky, I said must somewhere, stop . . .” the ellipsis indicating the time in which her curiosity takes over and she begins to explore the limitations that she suspects are within her reach (23). Her suspicions are confirmed, as she exclaims “And-sure enough!-I see the top!” when she has achieved her goal of reaching the peak of the boundaries set before her (24). However, this initial excitement of attaining her highest achievement and thus gaining new knowledge immediately starts to cause dire repercussions.

With knowledge comes disappointment, as she discovers the sky is not as “grand” as she had been taught. Again, the protagonist suspects that the sky is close enough to touch, stating “I’most could touch it with my hand!” (26). There is still an element of child-like denial in this statement, yet she is still hoping that the promise of a world created by God which will never disappoint. She still not been completely dismissed her faith. While these suspicions remain only in her thoughts, she is safe. However, she moves beyond thoughts to actions, as the following

line, “And reaching up my hand to try,” shows that ultimately pushes herself to Fall. She knows that knowing is better than not knowing. Her actions will confirm her suspicions and she will leave the naïve world of the Innocent.

The Fall occurs as the protagonist “screamed to feel [her hand] touch the sky” (28). Again she begins to feel the claustrophobia of her surroundings at the end of this eighteen-line stanza. The illusion of the perfect Eden has been lost. Infinity settles over her and the Fall is underway as she realizes that by going to boundaries that were previously suffocating her, she is now given access to a world beyond the Innocent and into a reality where struggle and hardship exist.

As I have explained previously, the Orphan has been disenchanted from the naïve state that she previously embodied, with the measure of naiveté congruent to the level of dissatisfaction with the world around her. Illustrating the beginnings of her collapse into disillusionment, the protagonist exclaims,

“I screamed, and –lo!-Infinity  
Came down and settled over me” (29-30).

She has begun to fully experience The Fall, as the limitless possibilities she desires come crashing down upon her.<sup>10</sup> The scream along with the pressure of infinity weighing upon her emphasize the violence of the following two lines. Infinity seems to be assaulting her as it

forced back my scream into my chest;  
Bent back my arm upon my breast (31-32).

Following this rape<sup>11</sup> by the infinite, the protagonist exclaims

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<sup>10</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “infinity” as “The quality or attribute of being infinite or having no limit; boundlessness, illimitableness.”

And, pressing of the Undefined

The definition on my mind,

Held up before my eyes a glass (33-35).

The “Undefined” could be many things. However, as the following line confirms, she knows the “definition” of this “Undefined.” Therefore, the Undefined is something she has either experienced, been exposed to, or has anticipated previously. Given the stages in which the protagonist is circling through, the Orphan’s fear of abandonment and isolation in the face of change brings about uncertainty, forcing her to look to her “Undefined” Rescuer to assist her in her journey to overcome her denial and move toward a greater understanding of herself and the world around her.

The “Undefined” character that is now in control of the protagonist holds a glass to the eye of the speaker, which she describes as saying,

Through which my shrinking sight did pass

Until it seemed I must behold

Immensity made manifold; (36-38).

A glass is held up to her eye, and when she looks through it, she is able to comprehend the limitless possibilities which lay before her and the rest of the world (*OED* “Immensity” “manifold”). The speaker seems to be having an existential crisis, as she realizes her life has no inherent meaning. She realizes that her life will only have meaning if her principles guide her to her full potential. Not living up to this full potential will render her life meaningless, and thus she will stay in the naive state of the Innocent. Following the observation of “immensity made

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<sup>11</sup> Suzanne Clark in her article “*Jouissance* and the Sentimental Daughter: Edna St. Vincent Millay” also refers to this scene as a “rape,” explaining that “Critical to Millay’s struggle in “*Renascence*” is an ambiguity about the gender of the “other.” She undergoes as what seems to be a Leda-like rape by the infinite” (149).



manifold,” the “Undefined” figure who is now a part of the journey the protagonist has begun plays the part of what Pearson calls the “Rescuer.” Orphans “believe there are authorities who know what the truth is. The trick is to find them and follow their advice, for they will save them from powerlessness, ignorance and error” (Pearson 34). Although initially afraid of repeated abandonment and exploitation, Pearson goes on to explain that following the Fall, the journeyer feels the need to put their faith into the hands of another who she believes will help. This not only helps the Orphan move to her next stage, but to feel empowered because of making a decision that will push the journeyer to the next stage of the journey. The “undefined” one that the protagonist of “Renascence” has chosen

Whispered to me a word whose sound  
Deafened the air for worlds around,  
And brought unmuffled to my ears,  
The gossiping of friendly spheres,  
The creaking of the tented sky,  
The ticking of Eternity (39-44).

The “Rescuer” has provided the Orphan with the information or encouragement, described as part of a “friendly sphere,” necessary to move her forward, away from the trauma of Fall, towards the ultimate goal of the understanding and self-actualization that she seeks. The protagonist in the first three stanzas of “Renascence” has now moved through the stages of Innocent and Orphan and has encountered her “rescuer.” Just as the poem has just begun, so has her archetypal journey towards a greater understanding of herself and the world around her.

### CHAPTER 3.

**“AH, AWFUL WEIGHT! INFINITY**

**PRESSED DOWN UPON THE FINITE ME!”**

### **THE SECOND DEATH**

Carol Pearson explains the underlying message produced by the Wanderer’s journey as “consciously taking one’s journey, setting out to confront the unknown, marks the beginning of life lived at a new level. For one thing, the Wanderer makes the radical assertion that life is not primarily suffering, it is an adventure” (51). The protagonist of “Renascence” has made the decision to move from the naive state of the Innocent through the chaotic confusion and suffering of the Orphan to the curiosity of the Wanderer. She has left the world of the known to enter a Universe of the known.

#### **The Wanderer**

In the fourth stanza, as the speaker begins to see and understand the ways of the world which she had been unaware of in her previous state, she says,

I saw and heard, and knew at last

The How and Why of all things, past,

And present and forevermore (45-47).

She arrives at the Wanderer stage and begins to gain the knowledge that comes from opening oneself up to experience as she has, now having escaped from the captivity of her previous world and searching for a clearer understanding of herself and the world around her. Pearson states, “if

the Orphan's story starts in paradise, the Wanderer's begins in captivity" (52). Having escaped now from the oppressed captivity of her Innocence and Orphanhood, instances of sexual imagery are used in the fourth stanza, beginning with lines

The Universe, cleft to the core,

Lay open to my probing sense (48-49).

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to "probe" means "to pierce, penetrate, or examine with a probe, esp. something sharp, in order to test or explore; (also) to search (a person's body) closely for something concealed." Considering this definition, the reader can see that world is divided to its very origin for the protagonist to "penetrate" and explore closely for what is concealed. Pearson explains that "whether Wanderers journey only inward or outward, they make a leap of faith to discard the old social roles, which they have worn to please and to ensure safety, and try instead to discover who they are and what they want" (51). The protagonist has abandoned her previous habit of merely spinning in a circle, watching the landscape with no progression, and instead is beginning to move forward, delving deeper into her surrounding world. After focusing on her visual and audio senses in the first part of her exploration in which she "saw and heard, and knew at last" of her new surroundings, her mouth becomes part of the exploration as well, exclaiming,

That, sickening, I would fain pluck thence,

But could not,-nay! (50-51).

She is drawn to the "cleft" of the Universe and gladly pulls from it the knowledge that she seeks, evoking the imagery of Eve plucking the apple from the tree of knowledge.<sup>12</sup> However, she

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<sup>12</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "fain" as "Glad, rejoiced, well-pleased" and "pluck" as "A sudden sharp pull, esp. of something of which one has just taken hold (formerly *spec.* in wrestling or manual combat); a tug, jerk, or snatch"

foreshadows the torment that will result from taking this action and achieving this knowledge, as she will somehow be unsettled by it.<sup>13</sup> She tries to illustrate that she attempted to assert some control over her probing sense by insisting that she “could not,-nay!” (51). However, as the Earth has opened up all its wonders to her, and although she would like to tear herself away, she cannot,

but needs must suck

At the great wound, and could not pluck

My lips away till I had drawn

All venom out (51-54).

The speaker is sucking at the cleft of the Universe, the wound, and even though she would like to draw herself away, her desire overcomes her.<sup>14</sup> Pearson explains that “the tensions between the desire for growth, for mastery, for pushing the limits of one’s capacity to achieve versus one’s desire to please and fit in is a quintessential Wanderer’s dilemma,” aligning this moment of the protagonist’s confusion with Pearson’s interpretations of the fundamental Wanderer’s qualm.

Pearson insists that “This process of listening to our own desires and acting to fulfill them is fundamental to building identity” (62). Thus, in furthering her journey, the protagonist acts on her desires, unable to control herself as she attempts to extract from the Universe all the knowledge she discovered was unattainable in the first stanza when her views of the landscape were so limited. She feels as though she is no more than a “fearful pawn” (54). This confusion and conflict between what the protagonist wants and needs is characteristic of what ails the

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<sup>13</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “sickening” as “That causes sickness, nausea, or faintness; that disgusts or revolts; repulsive, loathsome. Also in weakened sense.”

<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Clark in her article “*Jouissance* and the Sentimental Daughter: Edna St. Vincent Millay” also discusses the sexual imagery of this portion of the poem, asserting that “The universe is “cleft to the core,” not phallic, and the “Undefined” is like a great female body of the mother. The self’s return is not to the breast, however, but to a “great wound” she must suck (the place of female castration). The sucking at the wound is an identifying with pain—self as suffering and compassion, a universal sympathy” (152-154).

Wanderer. However, Pearson insists that “unless we allow ourselves to admit that we do not really know who we are and what we want, we never will know, nor will we know who we are and what we want if we just sit there without trying anything. This is why sometimes in our journeys we actually must wander a bit to grow” (61-62). Although she is confronted with an unsettling reality, she must wander to grow towards true individuation.

Marilyn May Lombardi’s article featured in *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal* entitled “Vampirism and Translation: Millay, Baudelaire, and the Erotics of Poetic Transformation” provides an interesting link between this passage and vampirism. She claims that

the heroine of ‘Renaissance’ is transgressive both because she refuses to sacrifice to love and because she uses her critical intelligence to expand the boundaries of knowledge. She dares to challenge the male monopoly on penetration. But the Universe and Infinity bar her ascension, and the world violently impresses its law on her body and soul. As a woman, she must expand not her critical but her affective faculties, since sentimentality is her ‘natural’ medium (137).

This interpretation could perhaps provide evidence for the ways in which Millay’s protagonist sites imagery and scenarios in “Renaissance” that establish the connection with her female audience. When the protagonist attempts to enter into an activity largely attributed to men, the Universe holds her back and pushes her into the Martyr role in the fifth and sixth stanzas. As a result, she feels alone and powerless and is trying gain whatever knowledge necessary to bring her back to Innocence. However, instead of bringing her back to her previous state, the knowledge of “How and Why of all things” brings her closer to the next stage in her heroic journey (46).

## The Martyr

After the poem depicts the protagonist as wandering into the cleft of the Universe that she has probed for further understanding, the following four stanzas illustrate the speaker's movement from the Wanderer stage and beyond to the Martyr stage. Pearson explains that it is customary for Wanderers to begin to move from isolation back to community, as "the archetypal Wanderer moves from dependence to independence to an autonomy defined in the context of interdependence. Many who have learned to embrace their independence and even solitariness find later they miss human connection. They become capable of experiencing intimacy at a new level" (72). For this new level of intimacy, the protagonist of "Renaissance" will "pay a toll/an infinite remorse of soul" (55-56). She seems to be moving between marked characteristics often present in those who first pass through the Martyr stage and the pseudo-Martyr element, one moment feeling emotional pain from the visions in front of her, and the next feeling sorry for herself for having to make the journey. For example, she exclaims,

All sin was of my sinning, all  
 Atoning mine, and mine all the gall  
 Of all regret. Mine was the weight  
 Of every brooded wrong, the hate  
 That stood behind each envious thrust,  
 Mine every greed, mine every lust" (58-62).

Norman Brittin in his revised edition of *Edna St Vincent Millay* points out this passage in particular, saying "Though the poem contains many examples of effective run-on lines, the enjambment is especially fine in this passage, the stresses falling on key words" (29). She speaks in a rush, emphasizing the breadth of her pain with the emphasis on "All" to "every." She

identifies with the pain and brings upon herself all the suffering and compassion that comes with sacrifice. Thus, Pearson explains that “while the Orphan seeks rescue from suffering, the Martyr embraces it, believing it will bring redemption” (98).

This all-encompassing compassion and sacrifice is typical to the Martyr stage. As Pearson says, Martyrs “believe that salvation must be earned by suffering and hard work,” and therefore the speaker is suffering for all those in the world experiencing hardship (Pearson 101). However, initially the speaker is only in what Pearson calls the “pseudo-martyr” stage, where “the actions are sacrificial, the form is right, but the goal is the same as the Orphan’s –to find a way to be saved” (101). Shortly after describing the speaker’s burden, she exclaims,

And all the while, for every grief,  
Each suffering, I craved relief  
With individual desire; (63-64).

Although she is suffering along with the entire world in its misfortune, she still is fighting to release herself from this epiphany and return to her previous state of being as an Innocent. Pearson also points out that at this stage, many “pseudo-Martyrs” feel briefly angry because of their own self-sacrifice (101). The speaker of “Renascence,” after expressing her desire to escape, exemplifies this by crying out,

Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire  
About a thousand people crawl;  
Perished with each,--then mourned for all! (66-68).

The speaker’s anger turns to compassion, as she now enters fully into the Martyr stage of the heroic journey. Lombardi takes a similar attitude towards this sacrifice, explaining that

rather than carve her deep mark in the Universe, she must absorb its pain and serve as a compassionate ‘rod,’ the conductor, the conduit, the bearer of all human suffering. Only with the soul fed on the carrion comfort of remorse and with a heart swollen with empathy can she hope to keep the sky from caving in on her by and by. In ‘Renascence,’ then, Millay’s poetic persona becomes a strangely hobbled vampire, one that inflicts no wounding kiss on the world, but instead, ingests its poison like a medicinal leech or selfless martyr (137).

Although Lombardi mentions the martyr specifically as an image attributed to the protagonist in “Renascence,” she asserts that this poem promotes the idea that sacrifice is the only method to which women can contribute to the world around them, thus keeping the world from “caving in” on them. However, the poem does not conclude with this Martyring stage nor this unquestionable sacrifice, but continues to show the protagonist fight the urge to wallow in self pity due to the complexities of the world around her in the Warrior stage. In addition, the poem culminates in the Magician stage, in which the protagonist not only is able to appreciate what Pearson calls “transformative sacrifice” necessary to contribute to the world around her, but also the necessity of self preservation and appreciation for the gifts, shown through nature imagery, that have been bestowed upon her by God.

Carol Pearson examines the idea of “transformative sacrifice” in her study of the Martyr. She explains that

at a higher level, the Martyr is not trying to bargain to save herself but believes that the sacrifice of self will save others...Similarly, the proponents of modern existentialist thought, finding no inherent meaning in life’s suffering, often urge social action and



putting aside instant gratification of whims in favor of working to make the world a better place for us all (103).

The protagonist demonstrates her fulfillment of the “transformative sacrifice,” thus pushing her further in her journey in the sixth stanza of “Renascence.” The speaker particularly captivates this understanding of sacrifice, as she describes a starving man whose hunger she feels as well and wishes to satisfy, as well as a boat which has been struck and whose passengers are sinking rapidly. The speaker feels the screams in her own throat as she witnesses those of the passengers. She desires a unity with all growth and suffering, so that in making it her own, she can actively alleviate it. Suzanne Clark in her essay “*Jouissance* and the Sentimental Daughter: Edna St Vincent Millay” explains that

this scene of sympathetic identification has a long literary history and, in particular, a strong connection with women’s literature because it is the very type of sentimental moment...The encounter resembles the sympathetic pause of the sentimental traveler to be found even in Wordsworth, but it is an emotional witnessing that the Modernists rejected (150).

The moment in which she describes the starving man and the sinking boat is a sentimental display, as the speaker in “Renascence” is an emotional witness to the wounded and then takes on this sentiment as her own, a narrative element which Modernist would have disregarded and attributed to overindulgence in emotion and sentiment. However, Pearson asserts that

appropriate sacrifice gives Martyrs a deeper knowledge of their values and commitments to work and to others, and hence makes them more, not less, themselves. Conversely, inappropriate sacrifice makes them lose touch with themselves and with the capacity for love, intimacy, or the joy of connection. The result is a tendency to vicarious experience,

to substitute someone else's identity for her own. Thus, it becomes critical that the other person live up to her expectations (108).

Therefore, it seems essential for the speaker of "Renaissance," as she goes through this journey towards an existentialist understanding of herself and the world around her, to experiencing the Martyr stage, as it enables her to understand her own values through her sacrifice. Norman Britten explains that

the poem returns to the general: hurt and death create compassion; but in fact it is the blended elements of godhead, omniscience plus love, justice, and pity: 'All suffering mine, and mine its rod;/Mine, pity like the pity o God—' that prove to much for the 'finite Me.' For how can one—especially when young, at the threshold of adult years—face such a world. Better to die than participate in so poisoned with suffering and sin. At last the 'anguished spirit' is free; the poet sinks into the earth and enjoys the peace of death (30).

The weight of the horrible world becomes too much and causes her to contemplate death, she has sacrificed beyond her capabilities, as Pearson claims that "making decisions about when and how much to sacrifice helps is learn who we are" (105). The protagonist "suffered death, but could not die" (90), as she has experienced all the pain of the deaths of those she has witnessed, though this death has not been granted for herself. Her desire to die comes not from ailment or martyrdom sacrifice, but instead for selfishly needing the pain to disappear, realizing that she has reached the limit of sacrificial abilities. As the eighth stanza begins, the speaker's craving for death ends and

Quietly the earth beneath

Gave way, and inch by inch, so great

At last had grown the crushing weight,  
 Into the earth I sank till I  
 Full six feet under ground did lie (92-96).

The weight on her soul as a result of her new vision and understanding escapes her as “there is no weight/Can follow here” (97-98) and she runs away from it for fear of never escaping the torture this new knowledge that has been revealed to her. Pearson speaks to this in her description of the Martyr stage, explaining that “the beginning of wisdom is being able to distinguish between transformative sacrifice and mere suffering caused because we are too cowardly or too unimaginative to think of a more joyous way to live” (109). Her cowardice has overtaken her, pushing her back into the Wanderer stage, allowing her to search again for the way to achieve a clearer understanding of herself and the world around her in a manner more fitting to her current place in her journey.

This “death” of the speaker marks the beginning of her return to the Wanderer stage. She had fled to “death” because she feels she cannot find her purpose or identity in the world. She has failed in life to live up to her full potential and therefore has gone against the existentialist idea of her purpose. In her coffin, six feet underground, she is alone and is able to make the journey in her mind towards understanding her purpose. After all, the protagonist explains that

there is no weight  
 Can follow here, however great.  
 From off my breast I felt it roll,  
 And as it went my tortured soul  
 Burst forth and fled in such a gust  
 That all about me swirled the dust (97-102).

Her tortured soul has escaped her body, as the weight of the pain of the surrounding Universe has held it fast to her chest prior to the weight become too great for her bare, thus pushing her the traditional six feet underground. Pearson argues that “opposition is critical to the formation of identity” (Pearson 67). Thus the speaker is now underground and is facing a period where her strength and will are the only things that will encourage her to find the meaning in her life that she is seeking.

“We all need a period of solitude to find out who we are,” Pearson contends, and this is exactly what results from the speaker’s solitude. The protagonist is content in isolation and has no desire for someone else to save her, as she previously wished for in the Orphan stage. The imagery of the tomb in which she lies calls upon the motherly attention she did not receive fully from the Universe as she says,

Deep in the earth I rested now.

Cool is its hand upon the brow

And soft is the breast beneath the head

Of one who is gladly dead (103-106).

The “tomb” can be easily linked to the earth’s “womb,” as no casket construction is mentioned in this particular passage. The “earth,” acts as the personified mother earth, its hand comforting and cooling her brow, as death often cools the body of the heat that signifies life and vitality. She is “gladly dead” now hoping to be able to settle into a life of peace and a return to innocence. She has fully retreated from her desire and is now wandering into a new way of discovering, alone and without an idea of what she truly wants.

As the protagonist wanders and attempts to find new footing, it is interesting to note how she embodies the final stages of the Martyr at this moment as well, as Pearson explains that

“ironically, it is only when this control is achieved [over life and destiny] that the hero can let it go and learn the final lesson of martyrdom—the acceptance of mortality “(114). She goes on to explain that

the final lesson of the Martyr is to choose to give the gift of one’s life for the giving’s sake, knowing that life itself is its own reward and remembering that all the little deaths, and losses, in our lives have always brought transformation and new life, that actual deaths are not final but merely a more dramatic passage into the unknown (115).

This element is revealed in the resurrection of the protagonist examined in the chapter to follow, as she reflects on what she has learned, what she still wants to know, and how living is a reward in it of itself.

As the protagonist has circled through the Wanderer and Martyr stages in the fourth through eighth stanzas of “Renascence,” surely the cyclical and recursive nature of Feminist Pearson’s archetypal theory is most evident in these stanzas, as the protagonist shifts forward and looks back, only to move forward again in the continuum of developmental stages suggested though archetypal theory. Although these stages are developmental, it is important to remember that there is no hierarchy amongst the stages. Each stage contains its own set of strengths, goals, and tasks to overcome in the cyclical recursive journey. Thus, the protagonist will continue her journey in the final stanzas of “Renascence” recursively moving between the Wanderer, Warrior, and Magician stages of Pearson’s archetypal journey.

## CHAPTER 4.

### “GOD, I CAN PUSH THE GRASS APART AND LAY MY FINGER ON THY HEART!”

#### THE RESURRECTION

The protagonist has now found peace six feet beneath the earth. However, the contentedness with her demise lasts only a moment before she comprehends the detriment of what she has done. As she revels in her isolation, she realizes that “all at once, and over all/The pitying rain began to fall;” (107-108). It is described as “pitying” as it consoles her in her state of fear and isolation and ultimately grants her understanding. The rain pours down on her and will breed the new knowledge and appreciation she will now gain from this isolation. The “roof” of her tomb, once revered as a womb-like protective enclosure, is now described as “lowly,” as she begins to understand the negative aspects of leaving the world to a life of isolation (110). After this brief description of the rain, the speaker recognizes that she

seemed to love the sound far more

Than ever I had done before

For rain it hath a friendly sound

To one who’s six feet underground (111-114).

She recalls her former self, an Innocent who viewed the world as only there to serve her with no pause for its beauty. The world which “bound” her and restricted her growth now calls to her with the “friendly” rain. The rain washed away her self-loathing and fear of the world around her and has revealed an appreciation for nature. Recalling Pearson’s idea of the Wanderer who

ultimately desires community after a period of isolation, she realizes the lack of human contact and “friendly face” in the “quiet place” that is the quiet tomb underground. She continues her discovery of beauty in the rain, speaking to its kind visit, exclaiming,

I would I were alive again  
 To kiss the fingers of the rain,  
 To drink into my eyes the shine  
 Of every slanting silver line,  
 To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze  
 From drenched and dripping apple-trees (119-124).

There is a new-found appreciation for something as simple as the God’s gift of the rain. The speaker has now fully moved out of the pseudo-Martyr stage in which she feels sorry for herself and those around her and moves into a state of gratitude. She has wandered alone and isolated herself in the deep grave and now wishes to emerge back into the community. As Pearson explains,

The archetypal Wanderer, then moves from dependence to independence to an autonomy defined in the context of interdependence. Many who have learned to embrace their independence and even solitariness later find that they miss human connection. They have become capable to of experiencing new intimacy because they have developed a strong enough sense of self that they are not afraid of being swallowed up in the other. To their surprise they often find, just when they are ready, that people, communities, exist who will love them for exactly who they are (72).

Millay emphasizes this desire to become reconnected and experience beauty with her word choice within alliterative phrases such as “drenched and dripping” and “each round drop/Rolls,

twinkling, from its grass-blade top” (124, 130). The speaker begins to desire a move away from isolation, saying

How can I bear it, buried here,  
While overhead the sky grows clear  
And blue again after the storm? (131-133).

Pearson explains “in each modality explored so far, our hero has learned to deal with a difficult experience: the Orphan has dealt with powerlessness; the Martyr, pain; the Wanderer, loneliness; and now the Warrior confronts fear” (82). As the protagonist’s experience becomes richer due to her new found appreciation of the world around her, so does the description and language she uses. This new appreciation for life and nature forces the protagonist to confront her fear, catapulting her into the next stage of her journey as the Warrior.

### **The Warrior**

Pearson explains that “As they (the hero(s)) resolve the conflict between love and autonomy by choosing themselves without denying their yearning for connections, the seemingly impossible conflict dissolves” (72). The protagonist of “Renascence” understands her need for introspection but also appreciates the world around her and all it has to offer to her in the future.

The protagonist shows in the tenth and eleventh stanzas many of the ways in which Pearson claims that the Warrior tries to claim her power and assert her identity in the world. According to Pearson, on the physical level, the Warrior asserts her right to be alive, an element obviously exemplified by the protagonist’s prayer and fight to be resurrected from her self-constructed grave. She has also achieved Warrior consciousness and illustrates the mentality of the Warrior on a psychological level, as she has recognized her ability to assert herself while still



maintaining appropriate boundaries: she knows she cannot pull herself completely away from the surrounding world, but at the same time, she has become more aware of her boundaries, the things she is able to do to help the world and what is beyond her control. Pearson also asserts that

Intellectually, the Warrior helps us to learn discrimination, to see what path, what ideas, what values are more useful and life-enhancing than others. On the spiritual level, it means learning to differentiate among spiritual energies and theologies: to know which bring more life and which kill or main the life force within us. The Warrior also helps us to speak out and to fight for what nourishes our minds, our hearts, and our souls, and to vanquish those things that sap and deplete the human spirit by speaking the truth about them and by refusing to countenance them or allow them to ruin our lives (75).

To mark the Warrior stage of her journey, the protagonist realizes what she values and realizes the spiritual energies that will bring her to new life instead of destroying her. A burst of desire comes forth as she lies in her self-constructed grave, praying

O God, I cried, give me new birth  
And put me back upon the earth!  
Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd  
And let the heavy rain, down-poured  
In one big torrent, set me free,  
Washing my grave away from me! (141-146).

She is willing to ask God for what she wants, fully moving her away from the isolation of the Wanderer and asserting the confidence and courage of the Warrior. In describing the Warrior's journey, Pearson asserts that "the developmental gift that comes from confronting one's own most frightening dragons –whether one slays them or merely stands up to them and begins a

dialogue –is *courage* and a corresponding freedom from bondage of one’s fears” (91). The protagonist has found the courage to speak out for what she wants, even if it is to an almighty God.

Millay inserts several implied metaphors in the following description of the protagonist’s prayer being answered, referencing the “herald wings,” “the vibrant string” of her “ascending prayer,” and the storm clouds that have “reared on high” (149-153). After this intense building of emotion, the climax occurs as the protagonist describes the final stages of God answering her prayer, saying “And the big rain in one black wave/Fell from the sky and struck my grave.” The alliteration and assonance of this phrase emphasizes the climatic turn, followed by the dramatic pause as the stanza ends and the twelfth stanza begins.

Although her time in the Warrior stage is brief, it is significant. She attacks the task of rebirth with assertiveness, confidence, courage, and respect as is characteristic of the Warrior. She has learned, as Pearson explains, that

to identify oneself as a Warrior is to say ‘I am responsible for what happens here,’ and ‘I must do what I can to make this a better world for myself and for others.’ It also requires Warrior to claim authority for themselves and for others. Warriors learn to trust their own judgment about what is harmful and, perhaps most important, they develop the courage to fight for what they want to believe in, even when doing so requires great risk (84).

She has changed her world by asserting her will and her image of a better world upon it.

## **The Magician**

Pearson differentiates the Magicians sensibilities from that of the other archetypes by explaining that “as Orphans, Wanderers, Martyrs, and Warriors, we find our identities in

opposition to a world imaged as hostile and dangerous. As Magicians, we claim the Universe as home, a friendly, inviting place to be, and in doing so, we reclaim innocence” (117). As the protagonist of “Renaissance” begins the process of emerging from her grave, she describes her surrounding in these inviting and friendly terms. She references all of her senses with this description, allowing all of her faculties to be a part of the glory that is the world around her. After the loud climax of her grave being struck by the rain of God and a slight pause marked by the stanza break, she slowly crescendos. The “fragrance,” the “sound,” the feeling of “the rain’s cool fingertips” and final climax emerges with her ability to see as referenced in the lines

And all at once the heavy night  
Fell from my eyes and I could see –, (170-171)

The enjambment between “night” and “Fell” only accentuates the importance of this moment. This description is followed by a tumbling of images. The images, which start small and become large, are each marked with their own alliterative pattern:

A drenched and dripping apple-tree,  
A last long line of silver rain,  
A sky grown clear and blue again (172-174).

She emerges with a newfound understanding of beauty and recognizes its wonder in things both big and small. With this recognition, she is granted the return of her soul:

And as I looked a quickening gust  
Of wind blew up to me and thrust  
Into my face a miracle  
Of orchard-breath, and with the smell, –  
I know not how such things can be! –

I breathed my soul back into me (175-180).

Millay's careful attention to where the line breaks occur allows the reader to almost feel the gust of wind enter the protagonist's body, the pauses emphasizing her amazement with the occurrence, and her subsequent elation as a result.

The following stanza begins with the speaker springing forth and crying out for in joy in a manner only a resurrection could produce. Pearson asserts that

the job of heroes is to enlighten the world by loving it—starting with themselves. Their task is not to slay the dragon—within or without—but to affirm the deepest level of truth about it; that is, that we are all one. Such dragons are only our Shadows, our unnamed, or unloved parts (125).

This is the hero that the speaker has now become. As she springs into life she rushes to all the trees and embraces them in appreciation. She sobs her praises to God for giving her the opportunity to appreciate all his beauty and promises to never forget the lessons she has been taught:

O God, I cried, no dark disguise  
 Can e'er hide from me  
 Thy radiant identity!  
 Thou canst not move across the grass  
 But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,  
 Nor speak, however silently,  
 But my hushed voice will answer Thee.  
 I know the path that tells Thy way  
 Through the cool eve of every day;

God, I can push the grass apart

And lay my finger on Thy heart! (192-202).

She vows to God that she will never lose sight of him again, no matter how quickly he moves through her or how softly he speaks to her. She understands that the earth and nature is where God and self-evaluation can come from, and her duty is to make the world a better place by enriching the world around her. Pearson claims that “the archetype of the Magician teaches us about creation, about our capacity to morph into being what never was there before, about claiming our role as cocreators of the universe... We do create our world and we are, therefore, responsible for our own lives” (Pearson 116). The soul of the protagonist has not only been reborn, but it has been reformed and transformed as a result of her journey.

Norman Brittin connects this to a passage from Milton, saying “the experience has been apocalyptic. In spite of dark disguises (the evil shot through the world), God is everywhere. The poet’s feeling of renewed certainty resembles that of Adam, who, ‘recell’d/To life prolong’d,’ was assured by Michael of God’s omnipresence: “and of his presence may a signe/Still following thee” (*Paradise Lost*, 11:330-31, 351-52 as qtd on 31).” The final lines of the poem speak of the message that the Protagonist has learned on her journey and calls to mind the questions she had at the beginning. The speaker answers these questions readily saying,

The world stands out on either side

No wider than the heart is wide;

Above the world is stretched the sky,--

No higher than the soul is high.

The heart can push the sea and land

Farther away on either hand;

The soul can split the sky in two,  
 And let the face of God shine through.  
 But East and West will pinch the heart  
 That can not keep them pushed apart;  
 And he whose soul is flat—the sky  
 Will cave in on him by and by (203-214).

This final warning speaks to all the readers as they continue on their own journey towards the Magician stage. Brittin claims that “the poet concludes from her experience that life is not to be estimated in terms of material environment: the dimensions of someone’s life are commensurate with heart-breadth (sympathy) and soul height (spiritual elevation)” (31). The limits of one’s life can only be determined by her and her successes will only be appreciated and celebrated if they come from a desire within. John Hyde Preston affirms the effectiveness of this passage saying,

To broaden our scope, to reach out for all things good and bad as parts of being, and to infuse into that being all that there is of mystery and wonder, is an ideal to be persistently sought after if we are ever to achieve fulfillment. And in ‘Renaissance,’ that magnificent celebration of individual consciousness –with its restriction or freedom, as the soul makes choice –she has pointed to this with exquisite artistry (145).

The Magician archetype is characterized by the ability to find the value of pain. Denying pain only allows for it to be continued. By experiencing it and speaking to it, the Magician can move from it and experience joy and empowerment in a new way that denial does not allow. She can experience the true joy of human vulnerability and love. The final stanza of “Renaissance” that speaks to receiving and inviting this vulnerability is biblically resonated through Matthew 7:7-9 as “Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock, and the door will be opened. For

everyone who asks received, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Being open to the lessons life has to offer is what truly characterizes a hero, and the recognition of this is what truly allows the Magician archetype to thrive as it is able to through the protagonist of “Renascence.” Pearson asserts that

If we fear nature and see it as inferior to spirit, if we see it as a place of danger where wild animals or bugs will devour us, we will not be able to be nourished by it. If we fear other people (that they will reject, ridicule, or harm us), we will not be able to experience deep love and commitment to and from them. In short, we take our solitary journeys so that we can live in love and harmony with ourselves and others, and so that we can be bathed in the flow of loving energy that is always around us. It comes from inside ourselves, from other people, from the natural and spiritual worlds. It is always available. The heroic task is to develop enough of a self to receive it without being afraid of getting lost in it or overwhelmed by its power (154).

This passage from Pearson reflects the sentiment of the final passage in “Renascence.” From her solitary journey, the protagonist has learned the necessity of engaging with the life around her. The limitations of one’s abilities are determined by the hero and her recognition of God’s gifts, not by extraneous circumstances. By taking the trust of the Innocent, the faith of the Orphan, the sympathy of the Martyr, the autonomy of the Wanderer, the confidence and courage of the Warrior, and finally the acceptance and joy of Magician, the hero can truly appreciate the world and all it has to offer, avoiding the “flat” soul, and ultimately the crushing limitations that can come from denial.

## CHAPTER 5.

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has used Feminist archetypal theory, more specifically the archetypes referenced in Carol Pearson's *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* as lens through which to view Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Renascence" in ways that have not been studied before. I hope to reestablish the worth and benefits of using and revisiting the poetry of Millay and Feminist archetypal theory in the literary field. I believe this work calls for a reestablishment of both as viable text for the literary field to reconsider in the continuously evolving canonization process. Doing so would provide many fresh and exciting implications for New Historicism, Cultural Criticism, Pedagogical theory and practice, and well as literary studies, in terms particularly Millay scholarship.

#### **Implications for Archetypal Theory in New Historicism and Cultural Criticism**

Harriet Monroe in her review of *The Lyric Year* said of the poem "Renascence," that "it requires a rare spiritual integrity to keep one's sense of infinity against the persistent daily intrusions of the world, and the flesh of the devil; but only the poet who keeps it through the years can sing his grandest song" (33). Millay was able to keep her poetic spirit alive as well in her subsequent work, but her initial poem "Renascence" will forever remain memorable, particularly from a young woman of nineteen. By showcasing this poem in conversation with Carol Pearson's ideals of the archetypal hero's journey in *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* readers gain a better understanding of some of the subtleties the poem has to offer that



articulate Millay's ability to connect with her female readers. In addition, archetypal theory can provide a lens which allows a more complete perception of Millay, her work, and the time period in which she lived. For example, Cheryl Walker in her article "Antimodern, Modern, and Postmodern Millay" points out the applicability of her work to New Historicists and cultural critics, saying,

her life-text is a gold mine. She lived through two world wars, supporting conscientious objectors in the first and advocating military engagement in the second. She picketed in favor of Sacco and Vanzetti and was accused of being a Communist sympathizer. She advocated free love. Many of the cultural currents of the twentieth century ran through her life (177).

By investigating the experiences of women at the time and reflecting on the experiences Millay wrote about and experienced personally, readers could see more clearly the parallels in these experiences through the archetypal lens.

### **Implications for Archetypal Theory in Pedagogical Theory and Practice**

Many educators in varying levels and areas of studying are utilizing Jungian concepts to teach and discuss both literature and film. In addition to Jung claiming himself that his psychology is "holistic," a popular movement in the theories and practices discussed in pedagogy scholarship, Clifford Mayes in his book *Jung and Education* points out that

Jungian psychology offers a way to frame our educational questions, interests, and practices so that we can learn from each other's deepest beliefs without either imposing or negating our own beliefs in the process, whether these beliefs are "formal" or

“informal.” Jungian terms and techniques provide a way to carry on fruitful and friendly psychospiritual dialogue in a multicultural, postmodern environment (2).

Coupled with the fact that this addresses many of the concerns surrounding the Education field at the present time, examples of the use-value of Jungian concepts, Pearson in particular, in film, literature, and writing courses are available. For example, James F. Iaccino in his book *Psychological Reflections on Cinematic Terror: Jungian Concepts in Horror Films* uses Carol Pearson’s work in particular to extract patterns prevalent in many horror films that range from *Alien* to *Frankenstein* to the *Halloween* series. Identifying these patterns and expounding upon them in a Film course can educate students in a way which helps them to construct their own narratives and scripts for future films.

Another example of the ways in which Pearson’s work has been used to enhance pedagogical theory and practice is in curriculum design materials. For example, Jim Burke’s *The English Teacher’s Companion* discusses Pearson’s usefulness in the High School curriculum as it relates to finding journey patterns in works of literature to help students “better understand the architecture or ‘story grammar’ of subsequent works they read” (45). Using Pearson’s archetypes in much the same way I have for this thesis, Burke encourages English teachers to explain these archetypes to students to illuminate patterns that exist across various workings by authors across genres and varying time periods.

Not only has Pearson’s work been used in instructing critical reading, but also in the instruction of informed construction of fictional works. For example, in *A Writer’s Guide to Fiction* by Elizabeth Lyon, the author uses Pearson’s work to discuss character development with creative writers of fiction, particularly as it relates to the construction of female heroines. She argues that using Pearson’s archetypes can help create a “meaningful past”:and complexity of

characters that allows growth to be seen more visibly (101). In addition to a personal account of using Pearson's archetypes when formulating her own creative fiction characters, she also encourages the writers to connect with their characters, explaining that "protagonists usually struggle with the very same issues of need that have wounded the writers. Our works are a reflection of our individual selves and of the culture and time in which we live" (104). She suggests using Pearson's archetypes to "infuse work with power and authenticity," as recognizing the writer's own experiences with each of the archetypes might bring the writer to a better understanding of the intended journey of the character (104).

### **Implications for Archetypal Theory in Literary Studies and Millay Studies**

Millay did not attempt to practice the modernist rebellion towards style, but instead hoped to create a commonality between herself and her readers. While her work might have been considered either shocking or elementary for her time period, her motive was not to alienate readers with complex allusions and difficult structures, but instead to make herself accessible to them, particularly to women readers. Writing at a time when women were well on their way towards the right to vote, Millay sought to maintain a women's tradition and to achieve commonality with her women readers. During modernism's insistence on intellect over sensibility, Millay revolted against the constructs of her time period to create an art that women could experience with sentiment, with an understanding of where the writer has been, because the reader has either been there as well, or anticipates the scenario in Millay's poem to occur in her own future. Just as feminist archetypal theory empowers women with the knowledge that their struggles are typical to many women who have succeeded in tearing down the boundaries set forth by patriarchal society, Millay sought to achieve the same commonality with her readers,

Therefore, despite its lack of reputation in academic fields, archetypal theory is a viable lens through which to analyze Millay's poetry, as it may elucidate much of the cohesion she attempted to create with her female audience, moving away from the assumption that she should be dismissed from the canon because she lacks the talent or foresight to construct valuable poetry.

Overall, Pearson's work and that of many other feminist archetypal scholars deserve the investigation of the many areas of the University that may benefit from its incorporation into their scholarship and pedagogy. As I have said previously, Pearson's theories are conceptualized cyclically rather than linearly, so elements of each of the phases can be illuminated in each of these section of the poem, though the archetypes I have listed in relation to each of the chapters dominates that that particular section. Millay's "Renaissance" illustrates the cyclical nature of the woman's heroic quest towards self-actualization, as the protagonists of her poetry move between the archetypes until ultimately concluding in varying stages of their journeys. The acknowledgment of these archetypes yields an understanding of the text through the perception of feminine empowerment as it exists in women's poetry from the early twentieth century, a notion which was only at the fingertips of many women's expectations of themselves at this point in history

Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* defines the hero as "the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo: Holdfast the keeper of the past" (337). The hero hopes to bring new life to a dying culture. This is the very goal of the graduate students entering into the literary academy. As Cheryl Walker explains, notable anthologies are including Edna St Vincent Millay more frequently. Additionally, with the increasing prevalence of Feminist studies in English departments, women authors of the past are being reevaluated, and dissertations and thesis on

Millay in Literature departments as well as the use archetypal theory in Psychology<sup>15</sup> and Modern and Classical Language Departments<sup>16</sup> is growing in popularity. Although Millay and Pearson have not achieved canonicity up to this point to the degree of many of her peers, “graduate students become professors and teach undergraduates and eventually it’s no longer necessary to argue the value of a writer’s work. She has, for all intents and purposes, entered the canon” (Walker 176). Millay and Feminist archetypal theory enthusiasts continue to work towards this goal, one to which I hope this work has contributed.

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<sup>15</sup> See Marr, Hugh King. *Measurement of the dominant heroic archetypes: Development of the heroic myth index*. Diss. University of Maryland College Park, 1995. Dissertations & Theses: A&I, ProQuest. Web. 10 Jul. 2008.

<sup>16</sup> See Coffey, Anita Lee. *Six archetypes in selected novels of Ana Maria Matute*. Diss. Texas Tech University, 2002. Dissertations & Theses: A&I, ProQuest. Web. 4 Jul. 2008

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## APPENDIX A:

## RENASCENCE

1 ALL I could see from where I stood  
 2 Was three long mountains and a wood;  
 3 I turned and looked the other way,  
 4 And saw three islands in a bay.  
 5 So with my eyes I traced the line  
 6 Of the horizon, thin and fine,  
 7 Straight around till I was come  
 8 Back to where I'd started from;  
 9 And all I saw from where I stood  
 10 Was three long mountains and a wood.

11 Over these things I could not see:  
 12 These were the things that bounded me.  
 13 And I could touch them with my hand,  
 14 Almost, I thought, from where I stand!  
 15 And all at once things seemed so small  
 16 My breath came short, and scarce at all.  
 17 But, sure, the sky is big, I said:  
 18 Miles and miles above my head.  
 19 So here upon my back I'll lie  
 20 And look my fill into the sky.  
 21 And so I looked, and after all,  
 22 The sky was not so very tall.  
 23 The sky, I said, must somewhere stop . . .  
 24 And—sure enough!—I see the top!  
 25 The sky, I thought, is not so grand;  
 26 I 'most could touch it with my hand!  
 27 And reaching up my hand to try,  
 28 I screamed to feel it touch the sky.

29 I screamed, and—lo!—Infinity  
 30 Came down and settled over me;  
 31 Forced back my scream into my chest;  
 32 Bent back my arm upon my breast;  
 33 And, pressing of the Undefined  
 34 The definition on my mind,  
 35 Held up before my eyes a glass  
 36 Through which my shrinking sight did pass  
 37 Until it seemed I must behold  
 38 Immensity made manifold;  
 39 Whispered to me a word whose sound

40 Deafened the air for worlds around,  
 41 And brought unmuffled to my ears  
 42 The gossiping of friendly spheres,  
 43 The creaking of the tented sky,  
 44 The ticking of Eternity.

45 I saw and heard, and knew at last  
 46 The How and Why of all things, past,  
 47 And present, and forevermore.  
 48 The Universe, cleft to the core,  
 49 Lay open to my probing sense,  
 50 That, sickening, I would fain pluck thence  
 51 But could not,—nay! but needs must suck  
 52 At the great wound, and could not pluck  
 53 My lips away till I had drawn  
 54 All venom out.—Ah, fearful pawn:  
 55 For my omniscience paid I toll  
 56 In infinite remorse of soul.  
 57 All sin was of my sinning, all  
 58 Atoning mine, and mine the gall  
 59 Of all regret. Mine was the weight  
 60 Of every brooded wrong, the hate  
 61 That stood behind each envious thrust,  
 62 Mine every greed, mine every lust.

63 And all the while, for every grief,  
 64 Each suffering, I craved relief  
 65 With individual desire;  
 66 Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire  
 67 About a thousand people crawl;  
 68 Perished with each,—then mourned for all!

69 A man was starving in Capri;  
 70 He moved his eyes and looked at me;  
 71 I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,  
 72 And knew his hunger as my own.  
 73 I saw at sea a great fog bank  
 74 Between two ships that struck and sank;  
 75 A thousand screams the heavens smote;  
 76 And every scream tore through my throat.  
 77 No hurt I did not feel, no death  
 78 That was not mine; mine each last breath  
 79 That, crying, met an answering cry  
 80 From the compassion that was I.  
 81 All suffering mine, and mine its rod;

82 Mine, pity like the pity of God.

83 Ah, awful weight! Infinity  
 84 Pressed down upon the finite Me!  
 85 My anguished spirit, like a bird,  
 86 Beating against my lips I heard;  
 87 Yet lay the weight so close about  
 88 There was no room for it without.  
 89 And so beneath the weight lay I  
 90 And suffered death, but could not die.

91 Long had I lain thus, craving death,  
 92 When quietly the earth beneath  
 93 Gave way, and inch by inch, so great  
 94 At last had grown the crushing weight,  
 95 Into the earth I sank till I  
 96 Full six feet under ground did lie,  
 97 And sank no more,—there is no weight  
 98 Can follow here, however great.  
 99 From off my breast I felt it roll,  
 100 And as it went my tortured soul  
 101 Burst forth and fled in such a gust  
 102 That all about me swirled the dust.

103 Deep in the earth I rested now.  
 104 Cool is its hand upon the brow  
 105 And soft its breast beneath the head  
 106 Of one who is so gladly dead.  
 107 And all at once, and over all  
 108 The pitying rain began to fall;  
 109 I lay and heard each pattering hoof  
 110 Upon my lowly, thatched roof,  
 111 And seemed to love the sound far more  
 112 Than ever I had done before.  
 113 For rain it hath a friendly sound  
 114 To one who's six feet under ground;  
 115 And scarce the friendly voice or face,  
 116 A grave is such a quiet place.

117 The rain, I said, is kind to come  
 118 And speak to me in my new home.  
 119 I would I were alive again  
 120 To kiss the fingers of the rain,  
 121 To drink into my eyes the shine  
 122 Of every slanting silver line,

123 To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze  
 124 From drenched and dripping apple-trees.  
 125 For soon the shower will be done,  
 126 And then the broad face of the sun  
 127 Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth  
 128 Until the world with answering mirth  
 129 Shakes joyously, and each round drop  
 130 Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.  
 131 How can I bear it; buried here,  
 132 While overhead the sky grows clear  
 133 And blue again after the storm?  
 134 O, multi-colored, multiform,  
 135 Belovèd beauty over me,  
 136 That I shall never, never see  
 137 Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold,  
 138 That I shall never more behold!—  
 139 Sleeping your myriad magics through,  
 140 Close-sepulchred away from you!  
 141 O God, I cried, give me new birth,  
 142 And put me back upon the earth!  
 143 Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd  
 144 And let the heavy rain, down-poured  
 145 In one big torrent, set me free,  
 146 Washing my grave away from me!

147 I ceased; and through the breathless hush  
 148 That answered me, the far-off rush  
 149 Of herald wings came whispering  
 150 Like music down the vibrant string  
 151 Of my ascending prayer, and—crash!  
 152 Before the wild wind's whistling lash  
 153 The startled storm-clouds reared on high  
 154 And plunged in terror down the sky!  
 155 And the big rain in one black wave  
 156 Fell from the sky and struck my grave.

157 I know not how such things can be;  
 158 I only know there came to me  
 159 A fragrance such as never clings  
 160 To aught save happy living things;  
 161 A sound as of some joyous elf  
 162 Singing sweet songs to please himself,  
 163 And, through and over everything,  
 164 A sense of glad awakening.  
 165 The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear,

166 Whispering to me I could hear;  
 167 I felt the rain's cool finger-tips  
 168 Brushed tenderly across my lips,  
 169 Laid gently on my sealèd sight,  
 170 And all at once the heavy night  
 171 Fell from my eyes and I could see,—  
 172 A drenched and dripping apple-tree,  
 173 A last long line of silver rain,  
 174 A sky grown clear and blue again.  
 175 And as I looked a quickening gust  
 176 Of wind blew up to me and thrust  
 177 Into my face a miracle  
 178 Of orchard-breath, and with the smell,—  
 179 I know not how such things can be!—  
 180 I breathed my soul back into me.

181 Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I  
 182 And hailed the earth with such a cry  
 183 As is not heard save from a man  
 184 Who has been dead, and lives again.  
 185 About the trees my arms I wound;  
 186 Like one gone mad I hugged the ground;  
 187 I raised my quivering arms on high;  
 188 I laughed and laughed into the sky;  
 189 Till at my throat a strangling sob  
 190 Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb  
 191 Sent instant tears into my eyes:  
 192 O God, I cried, no dark disguise  
 193 Can e'er hereafter hide from me  
 194 Thy radiant identity!  
 195 Thou canst not move across the grass  
 196 But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,  
 197 Nor speak, however silently,  
 198 But my hushed voice will answer Thee.  
 199 I know the path that tells Thy way  
 200 Through the cool eve of every day;  
 201 God, I can push the grass apart  
 202 And lay my finger on Thy heart!

203 The world stands out on either side  
 204 No wider than the heart is wide;  
 205 Above the world is stretched the sky,—  
 206 No higher than the soul is high.  
 207 The heart can push the sea and land  
 208 Farther away on either hand;

209 The soul can split the sky in two,  
210 And let the face of God shine through.  
211 But East and West will pinch the heart  
212 That can not keep them pushed apart;  
213 And he whose soul is flat—the sky  
214 Will cave in on him by and by.